

Bringing Back the Disappeared

Decades after murdering 30,000 people, Argentina's military dictators may finally face justice.

By Joseph Huff-Hannon
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Forensic anthropologists Luis Fondebrider and Gabriela Ghidini analyze the remains of a young man in Buenos Aires.
PHOTO: JOSEPH HUFF-HANNON



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community calendar

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TUE OCT 5

6pm • Free
BOOK PARTY: *THE LOST SOUL OF HIGHER EDUCATION*. Come celebrate the publication of Ellen Schrecher's new book, which discusses the corporate assault on academic freedom.
Tamiment Library
Elmer Holmes Bobst Library 10th fl
70 Washington Sq South
212-998-2630 • Zk3@nyu.edu

THU OCT 7

4pm • Free
RALLY & MARCH: NATIONAL DAY OF ACTION TO DEFEND PUBLIC EDUCATION. In New York, supporters of public education will rally and then march through Harlem from 125th St. to the City College of New York.
Harlem State Office Building
163 W. 125th St.
march4ny@gmail.com • defendeducation.org

SAT OCT 9

8pm • \$15 suggested
SHOW: JIM PAGE & DAVE LIPPMAN. Page, who just released his 19th album, *Ghost Bikes*, has served as a model for many of today's songwriters. Lippman, a satirical folk singer with a social justice bent, has thrilled audiences of all ages with his post-corporate comic stylings. Doors open at 7:30 p.m.
The Community Church of New York
Unitarian Universalist, 40 East 35th St
212-787-3903 • peoplesvoicecafe.org

SUN OCT 10

1pm • \$12
CONCERT: MOUNTAINS AND GARDENS SAVE US! Join Reverend Billy and The Church of Life After Shopping gospel choir as they defend community gardens and pressure UBS Bank to withdraw its financing of mountaintop removal coal mining in Appalachia.
Highline Ballroom, 431 West 16th St
212-414-5994 • highlineballroom.com

7pm • TBA
CONCERT: JAMSTERDAM 350. This concert and arts event is part of 350.org's effort to raise awareness about the climate crisis. Come listen to local musicians and support a great cause — all proceeds go to the Green School in Brooklyn.
Sullivan Hall, 505 8th Ave
866-468-7619 • nyjamsterdam@gmail.com

11am–6pm • Free
FESTIVAL: 22ND ECOFEST. This year's ECOFEST, sponsored by West Side Cultural Center, will feature dynamic exhibits — including the Sources of Energy Other Than Oil vehicles exhibit — environmental groups, a recycling Olympics, music and dancing.
Battery Park City Esplanade Plaza,
South of North Cove Marina
212-496-2030 • ecofest.org

TUE OCT 12

6pm • Free
PANEL DISCUSSION: BLACK WOMEN AND COMMERCIALIZED BEAUTY. Join panelists Dr. Dana-ain Davis, professor of Urban Studies at Queens College and Eisa Ulen Richardson, author of *Crystelle Mourning*, for a fresh and contemporary perspective on this complex and controversial subject.
CUNY Graduate Center, Rm 9204, 365 5th Ave • 212-817-2076 • events.cuny.edu

WED OCT 13

6pm • Free
EXHIBIT OPENING: 'INTERRUPTED LIFE: INCARCERATED MOTHERS IN THE UNITED STATES.' A dramatic exhibit of painting, drawings, sculpture and photography that documents the experiences of incarcerated persons in the United States.
CUNY Graduate Center, Rm 6304.01, 365 5th Ave • 212-817-8751 • events.cuny.edu

THU OCT 14

7pm • Free
READING: *MUZZLING A MOVEMENT*. Attorney and author Dara Lovitz will discuss her book *Muzzling a Movement: The Effects of Anti-Terrorism Law, Money, and Politics on Animal Activism*.
Bluestockings Books, 172 Allen St
212-777-6028 • bluestockings.com

THU OCT 14- SUN OCT 17

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FESTIVAL: 3RD ANNUAL QUEER BLACK CINEMA INTERNATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL. This four-day film festival includes screenings of award-winning films, workshops, panel discussions and networking mixers. The festival is sponsored by the Queer Black Cinema Institute and Gay Men of African Descent.
National Black Theatre, 2031 5th Ave
212-722-3800 • queerblackcinema.org

OCTOBER

TUE OCT 5 • 7:30PM
BOOK PARTY & FORUM: *ECOLOGY AND SOCIALISM, SOLUTIONS TO CAPITALIST ECOLOGICAL CRISIS*. Chris Williams will discuss his new book, which argues that building social movements for environmental justice is key to solving the current environmental crisis. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

THU OCT 14 • 7:30PM
BOOK PARTY & FORUM: *THE HIDDEN 1970s: HISTORIES OF RADICALISM*. Author/editor Dan Berger and other contributors will discuss the myriad ways that radical social movements shaped American political culture in the 1970s and how they continue to do so today. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

SUN OCT 24 • 2PM
DISCUSSION: REPORT FROM KABUL: A CONVERSATION WITH KAYHAN IRANI. Kayhan Irani will discuss her recent trip to Afghanistan, where she presented a series of Theater of the Oppressed workshops with theater activists from throughout the country. Co-sponsored by the Theater of the Oppressed Laboratory. Sliding scale: \$6/\$10/\$15

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Columbia University, Wood Auditorium at Avery Hall, 431 Riverside Dr
212-935-3960 • preservationandclimatechange.org

THU OCT 19

6pm • Free
ART OPENING: THE CRUDE AND THE RARE. The Crude and the Rare is a group exhibition that features works in photography, video, sculpture, drawing and other mediums that address the political economy of precious substances such as gold, diamonds and oil and the tenuous effects of globalization.
41 Cooper Gallery, Cooper Union
212-353-4200 • cooper.edu

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Harlem Healthcare in Critical Condition

BY ALLAN MACOWEN

This past July, Harlem workers and residents were hit with yet another blow in the ongoing assault on living standards for working New Yorkers when the 200-bed North General Hospital in Harlem filed for bankruptcy and closed its doors.

The closing left 1,000 employees, most of them Harlem residents — including 900 members of 1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East — unemployed. Healthcare services for the community will deteriorate further, as other area hospitals are forced to bear additional burdens — such as 36,000 more emergency room admissions per year — with no additional resources.

The New York City political establishment — including Gov. David Paterson; Mayor Michael Bloomberg; Rep. Charles Rangel; Calvin Butts, the chairman of the board of trustees at North General and long-time pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church; and North General President Samuel J. Daniel — engineered the hospital's shutdown behind closed doors. They then took steps to minimize protest.

First, employees were given only four days' notice of the closure, even though the board of trustees decided on the move a week earlier and the plan had obviously been in the works for weeks. In the week before the announcement, Daniel assured union members that he was unaware of any plans to close the hospital.

Second, a public relations campaign downplayed the closing and assured Harlem residents that their healthcare needs

would be addressed. *The New York Beacon*, a weekly newspaper in Harlem, trumpeted the bankruptcy deal as having "saved" the hospital. Rangel and Butts assured the community that healthcare in Harlem was only getting better — an assertion belied by the fact that Butts stated under oath to the bankruptcy court that the hospital "has been vital to providing the residents of Harlem with the health services they critically require."

Bloomberg similarly brushed off concerns about increased emergency loads at other medical facilities, saying, "These things do have a habit of sort of working themselves out." But workers at other hospitals — which have had to pick up the slack not just from North General, but from other recently closed city hospitals — say the situation in emergency rooms has been chaotic and overwhelming.

Butts also assured North General workers that they would be able to find jobs elsewhere, including the new Institute for Family Health (IFH), a clinic taking over the building. These declarations have proved similarly hollow — IFH has so far employed fewer than 10 of the 900 union members dismissed at North General.

While the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) announced on Sept. 17 that it would issue a formal written complaint against IFH for violating numerous federal labor laws, the NLRB's decision is only a minor victory.

Though the complaint acknowledges 1199 SEIU's grievance against IFH for bringing in Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 153 to represent workers

making lower wages, only 100 jobs will be affected, and the rest of the North General building is being used to move nursing home patients from Roosevelt Island.

Perhaps the most outrageous aspect of all of this is that a New York state authority — the Dormitory Authority of the State of New York (DASNY) — controlled whether North General Hospital would stay open or not, because it holds most of the hospital's debt.

North General's bankruptcy papers show a total debt of \$293 million and assets of \$67 million. The Dormitory Authority of the State of New York's share of that debt is \$190 million. According to Butts' affidavit in bankruptcy court, North General hadn't obtained a waiver from DASNY for its breach of certain parts of the loan.

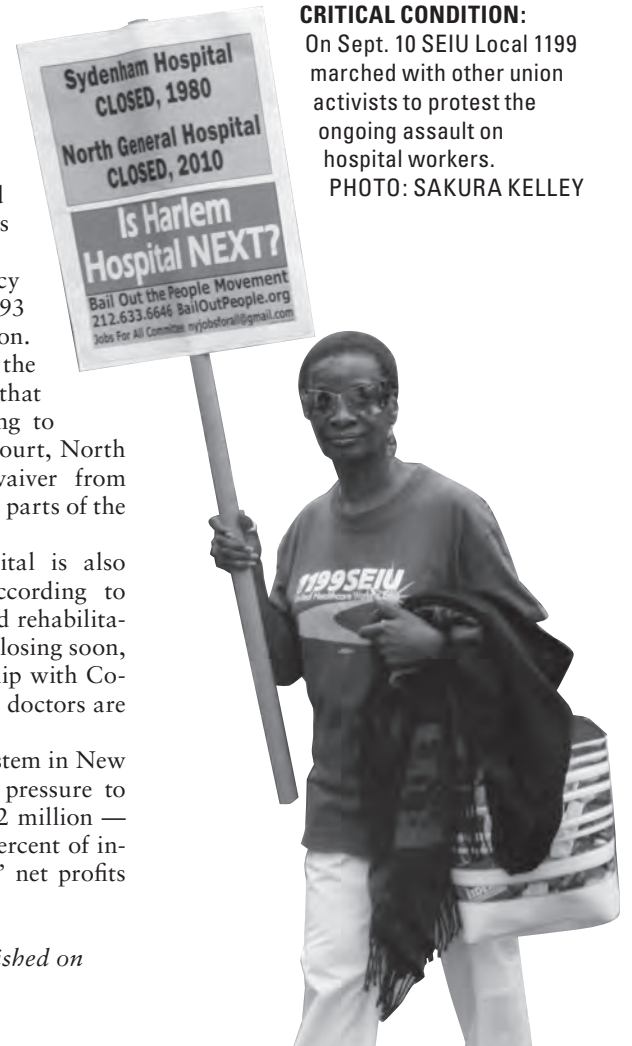
The 286-bed Harlem Hospital is also under increasing pressure. According to reports, Harlem's neurology and rehabilitation medicine departments are closing soon, the hospital's 50-year partnership with Columbia University is ending and doctors are being laid off in large numbers.

Indeed, the entire hospital system in New York City is under increasing pressure to reduce its overall deficit to \$762 million — which amounts to just over 5 percent of investment bank Goldman Sachs' net profits in 2009.

This article was originally published on SocialistWorker.org.

CRITICAL CONDITION:

On Sept. 10 SEIU Local 1199 marched with other union activists to protest the ongoing assault on hospital workers. PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY



A Dream Deferred

FINAL DREAMS: DREAM Act activists rallied outside Sen. Charles Schumer's office on Sept. 21 to pressure politicians for support. The act would offer undocumented youth raised in the U.S. a chance at citizenship if they commit to two years in the military or college. Although it did not pass in September, numerous organizations are pushing for the DREAM Act to be reintroduced as a stand-alone bill. PHOTO: SAKURA KELLEY

FBI Raids Peace Activists

Agents from the Federal Bureau of Investigation served 11 antiwar activists with subpoenas and raided eight residences across the Midwest Sept. 24. Activists in three other states, including California and North Carolina, were also approached for questioning in what warrants say is an investigation into material aid for terrorists.

"I was downstairs with my 6 year old who was running around in her underwear trying to get me to let her watch cartoons," said Steff Yorek, whose home was one of five raided in the Minneapolis area. Eight officers broke through her door with a battering ram, and later left with boxes that included computers and the journal of the recently deceased grandfather of her partner, Jess Sundin. Two homes were raided in Chicago, and five homes in Minneapolis, along with the offices of the Anti-War Committee.

Protests were held in 19 cities across the country in advance of the activists' October court dates.

—JOSÉ ALCOFF



'FBI RAIDS HAVE GOT TO GO': More than 100 activists marched outside FBI headquarters in Chicago to protest recent raids. PHOTO: JORGE MUJICA/MEXICO DEL NORTE

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Adapted & Performed by
TONY PALMIERI

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ECONOMY

Austerity Hustle

BY RICK WOLFF

The global capitalist crisis that started in 2007 has been neither short nor shallow. The real unemployment rate, the “U6” rate, has zoomed from 8 to more than 16 percent and remained there since May 2009. Home foreclosures have also soared and some eight million households are currently behind on their mortgage or in foreclosure, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. Benefits are being cut, real median household income is declining and jobs are increasingly insecure. And analysts are adopting the term “precariat” to describe the growing class of insecure workers.

Making matters worse, governments in many advanced capitalist countries have poured massive sums of money, chiefly into banks and other large corporations, to try to restart their moribund economies. Because governments dared not tax corporations and the rich to get those massive sums, they instead borrowed the money, mostly from those same two groups, by selling them bonds, bills and notes.

Governments borrowed and spent trillions to rescue and stimulate major banks and other corporations facing collapse. They purchased private banks’ bad loans, increased the money supply and lent it to banks at government-depressed interest rates, invested huge sums in banks and other corporations and finally bought non-financial corporations’ products. The lenders to those governments included

many rescued corporations. Major banks used bailouts — not to lend to consumers and businesses — too risky, they said, in this depression — but instead to governments, especially the United States.

Lenders now demand austerity programs that effectively shift the costs of the crisis and of governments’ responses from the corporations and the wealthy to everyone else. Austerity means laying off government employees and cutting public services, thereby freeing up money to pay the interest and principal what the governments borrowed.

By mid-2007, corporations, governments and individuals were finding it difficult to borrow funds. Prior to this, banks made many bad, uncollectible loans because they failed to properly assess risks. Many enterprises and individuals could no longer repay loans because their businesses, wages and salaries were not growing fast enough. As private borrowers defaulted, banks’ profits and their capital shrank. Rising default risks led banks to cut private lending, further undermining their profits.

CAPITALIST FREEZE

In the fall of 2008 the capitalist system ground toward a halt as the credit system froze. Desperate to unfreeze credit, governments guaranteed bank solvency and many private debts, invested massively in and lent to private banks, and became the ultimate borrower of a huge portion of loanable funds. Banks everywhere lent to govern-

ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY FOR ALL

BY COSTAS PANAYOTAKIS

The deepening economic crisis is confronting us with the harsh realities of the undemocratic capitalist system we labor under. Those most responsible for this crisis, such as the Wall Street banks, have been bailed out while corporate America is posting record profits once again. However, corporations are not hiring and the banks are not lending. As a result, the real unemployment rate is above 16 percent and the official poverty rate of 14.3 percent is the highest since 1994.

To add insult to injury, after watching trillions of dollars in public money being handed over to banks around the world, people are told that their governments must adopt austerity policies that sacrifice people’s lives in the name of reducing the deficit. In the United States, the mainstream consensus ignores the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs and homes and who find themselves destitute as meager unemployment benefits run dry. On the state level, battling the deficit means massive layoffs and budget cuts that decimate healthcare, education and other social services that are more urgent than ever.

As a student of society and an active member of the union representing the faculty and professional staff at the City University of New York, I wonder: Where is the labor movement in all this? The relative

quiescence of U.S. workers, when compared to other parts of the world, both helps to explain the current state of affairs and bodes ill as to the likelihood of reversing it.

REVERSING THE DECLINE

Yet reverse it we must. What it will take, however, is a serious rethinking of the American labor movement’s ineffectual long-term strategies, as well as the kind of direct action we saw in the case of the Republic Workers in Chicago, the Stella D’oro workers in the Bronx and, most recently, the Mott’s workers in upstate New York.

Prospects for a reversal seem dim. Labor has been in decline since the 1950s, following the gains won in bitter struggles by ordinary Americans and the working class during the Great Depression and the mid-20th century. These struggles resulted in the postwar social contract between labor and capital and a rudimentary welfare state. In these struggles, which included general strikes as well as tactical innovations such as industrial sit-ins, it was usually the rank and file that took the initiative, shaking up the capitalist class. Labor unions were recognized but they also assumed the function of containing the subversive and disruptive potential of grassroots militancy.

The current crisis has parallels with the run-up to the Great Depression: the exacerbation of economic inequality, the growth of debt and the proliferation of asset bubbles. At the same time, the level of worker

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FRI OCT 1, 7PM • FREE

READING: SHEILA ROWBOTHAM, *DREAMERS OF A NEW DAY: WOMEN WHO INVENTED THE TWENTIETH CENTURY*. Distinguished feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham will discuss her new book, which highlights the distinct and oftentimes discordant motivations and goals of women agitators.

TUE OCT 5, 7PM • FREE

READING: RYAN CONRAD, *AGAINST EQUALITY: QUEER CRITIQUES OF GAY MARRIAGE*. Join outlaw artist and terrorist academic Ryan Conrad for a reading from his new book and for a discussion of the queer critiques against dominant cultural values.

FRI OCT 8, 7PM • FREE

READING: KATE BORNSTEIN, *GENDER OUTLAWS: THE NEXT GENERATION*. Bornstein, along with other contributors to the book, will discuss their anthology of commentary, comic art, and conversations about barrier-breaking by sex/gender radicals from across the trans-spectrum.

WED OCT 13, 7PM • FREE

READING: REBECCA TRAISTER, *BIG GIRLS DON'T CRY: THE ELECTION THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING FOR AMERICAN WOMEN*. Traister discusses the significance of the 2008 election cycle for women in the United States.

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ments because it had become unsafe to lend to almost anyone else.

In this peculiar “nationalization” of debt, government temporarily functioned as both lender and borrower of last resort. Government thawed the credit system sufficiently to stop global capitalism from collapsing while hoping a massive stimulus would overcome the crisis. Back then, few policymakers or observers worried about the consequences of mushrooming government debts.

The government rescue of the U.S. financial industry sufficiently reduced interest rates and pumped enough money into the economy to give banks, large corporations and the stock market a heavily hyped “recovery” from the economic disaster of 2008. Their recovery started in March 2009, lasted a year and has now stalled. The U.S. corporate sector, like its European counterparts, now fears a

relapse into renewed economic decline, the so-called “double-dip recession.”

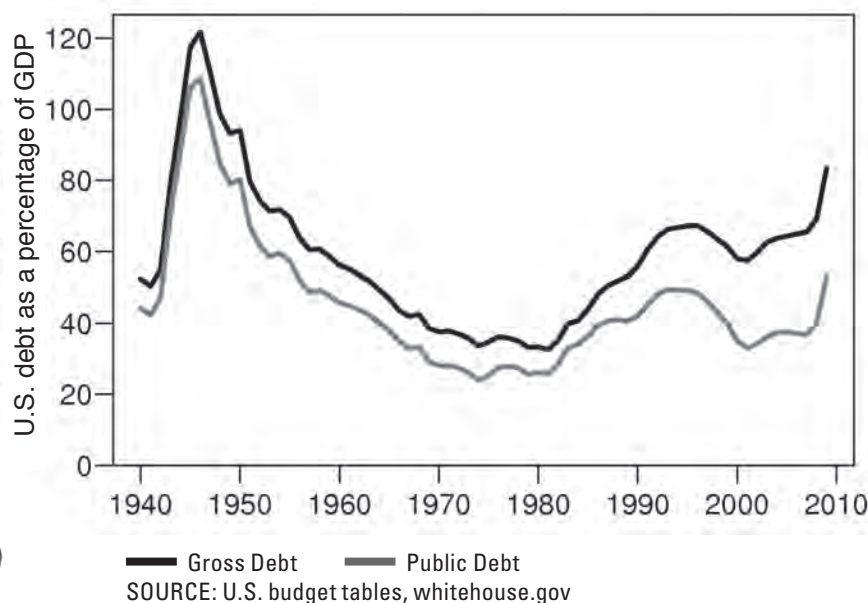
The bank and stock market recoveries never reached most of the rest of the economy. Stimulus programs tried to broaden the recovery beyond financial institutions and make it last for more than a year. Neither effort succeeded. Yet the stimulus was paid for by trillions borrowed from lenders who now demand austerity programs. The implied threat is if austerity is not imposed then governments will face higher interest rates on new and renewed loans or will be

denied loans, crippling governments’ usual operations.

Most political leaders fear that the banks’ threats, if carried out under their watch, would end their careers. This was precisely the situation faced by Greece, Ireland, Portugal, Hungary and other European countries as the crisis unfolded.

Austerity policies reveal a political conflict always simmering inside capitalism: who will pay increased taxes and who will

Continued on page 12



LUCY VALKYRIE

indebtedness is much higher today than in the 1930s. This may be one reason why most Americans have been quiet despite the suffering being inflicted upon them. In addition, the collapse of Soviet Communism has increased doubts that a radical alternative to capitalism is possible while reducing the willingness of the capitalist class to make any concessions to workers.

Many workers are also wary of engaging in militant action because the difficulty of finding another job amid an economic crisis makes strikes and other forms of resistance riskier. As such, labor unions are tempted to act defensively, salvaging whatever gains they can and waiting for an economic recovery that they hope will strengthen their hand in their negotiations with employers. As the New York State AFL-CIO’s recent endorsement of Andrew Cuomo demonstrates, this way of think-

ing prompts labor leaders to endorse even openly anti-labor politicians running on a platform of austerity and freezing public sector wages.

WHY ECONOMIC RIGHTS?

Rather than continuing with its failed defensive posture, the labor movement has an opportunity to catalyze a new political and economic project that challenges the undemocratic nature of capitalism. The principle animating such a project has to be economic democracy, meaning the right of all human beings to have an equal say over the economic decisions that affect their lives as well as the goals, priorities and nature of the economic system of which they are a part. Economic democracy could bring about social, economic and political changes to empower working people and dramatically improve their chances for a secure and more fulfilling life. It could also tap into much of the popular anger against the bailouts of the financial sector, an anger currently being harnessed by the Tea Party and the political right.

Economic democracy could facilitate alliances between labor and other progressive movements. An equal say over the economic decisions that affect people’s lives presupposes more than an end to class inequality. It also requires an end to any inequality, such as those based on race, gender, sexual orientation and immigrant status, which give some groups more political, social and eco-

omic rights than others. Economic democracy is also a necessary condition of ecological sustainability in a world where corporate capital in the global North is able to shift the environmental cost of its activity onto the rest of humanity.

Economic democracy inspires many movements today: recovered factories run democratically by workers in Argentina; participatory budgeting in cities around the world, which increases the say that ordinary citizens and disenfranchised groups have in public spending and investment; and the plan by the American Steelworkers Union and the Mondragon cooperatives in Spain to establish manufacturing cooperatives in the United States and Canada.

The current crisis has created an opening for a radical critique of the capitalist system and, with it, an opportunity for the labor movement. Right now, labor’s defensive posture plays into the hands of those who paint unions as greedy organizations that make U.S. corporations uncompetitive and saddle the majority of Americans not working in the public sector with higher taxes and public debt. But if the labor movement seized the moment, it could very well reverse its long-term decline and catalyze a movement that would prevent another economic disaster down the road.

Costas Panayotakis teaches Sociology at New York City College of Technology. His article on economic democracy and the left will be published in the December 2010 issue of Capitalism Nature Socialism (cnsjournal.org).

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When Manny Babbitt Came Home

By MARTI HIKEN

Manny Babbitt was walking down the street in Sacramento, Calif., on a foggy December night in 1980. An oncoming car startled him. He heard the movie *Story of G.I. Joe* airing on a television set, complete with the bombs and guns screaming at him. Leah Schendel was watching the movie at home with her screen door open. Manny's mind flashed from the dark green and black trash bags beside him outside Leah's apartment to the green and black body bags loaded onto the helicopters in Khe Sanh, Vietnam. He hurried into her apartment to turn off the television. And, Manny did what he was supposed to do — ensuring that the enemy was dead and his fellow soldiers were protected. He went through the ritual of securing the area. When Schendel got up to stop him, he struck her. She died from a heart attack. He tagged Leah Schendel's body after she died, so that she could be identified and arrive home safely. He covered her with a teapot and a mattress, and took keepsakes.

The story did not start there, of course; rather, it started when Manny, a poor Cape Verdean, was a child growing up in Wareham, Mass. It was typical for a death penalty case: repeatedly kept back in school, a drunk and brutal father, a mentally ill mother, a good child and protective of oth-

ers, suicides and mental illness in the family, and then, the first head injury and a changed behavior pattern as a result.

His life was a tragedy all around. So, Manny entered the military.

Manny could not have gotten into the Marines without the recruiter at South Providence filling out the general intelligence test for him. The military simply did not have enough troops that year; it needed the fodder.

After boot camp at Parris Island in South Carolina, Manny was assigned to an Ontos, a light anti-tank vehicle.

He loaded shells filled with darts that were fired at groups of North Vietnamese soldiers and shredded them to pieces. The young Marine described it as, "Body parts like red rags flying." Manny was 18 years old.

In the 77-day siege of Khe Sanh in 1968, there were 6,000 U.S. troops holding Khe Sanh against 40,000 North Vietnamese army regulars. Fighting was sometimes hand-to-hand. Most of the Marines at Khe Sanh were teenagers, young enough to develop the blank, flat expression they called "the thousand-yard stare."

In the course of the combat, the U.S. Air Force dumped more than 150,000 bombs into the surrounding jungle. When a soldier was killed, his comrades would try to cover the body with bedrolls, blankets — whatever might protect the body from the shrapnel and the rats. They would take personal be-

longings, such as cigarette lighters, as keepsakes. Then the corpse's ankle was tagged for identification.

On the 56th day of the siege, March 1968, a North Vietnamese rocket exploded on the airstrip in Khe Sanh and Manny was struck in the head. He became one of 2,000 U.S. casualties at Khe Sanh. He was loaded onto the helicopter on top of green and black body bags, and before the helicopter took off more dead Marines were thrown on top of him. He returned to combat at Khe Sanh one week later. Manny took part in five major campaigns in Vietnam.

Back home, Manny huddled in the middle of the wet streets in the dark, covered by cardboard and dressed in a fatigue jacket, camouflage pants and combat boots. He traveled with bottle caps, clicking them as though they were castanets. It was a technique used by soldiers to stay awake in the trenches of Vietnam. Manny used them to meditate. He screamed for help. "I am going to hurt someone."

JUSTICE GONE AWRY

In December 1980, Bill Babbitt, Manny's brother, made the hardest decision of his life. He told the police that he suspected his younger brother of having killed Schendel. Manny had come to live with Bill and his wife Linda in Sacramento that September after being released from a mental institution. Manny had been suffering from post-

traumatic stress symptoms ever since he returned from Vietnam in 1969. His life revolved around drugs, medications, internal combat and mental institutions.

Linda called Bill at work one day and said that she had found coins stashed around the house, and that Manny had been buying the kids gifts with extra money. That night Bill found a little choo-choo piggy bank packed with rolls of nickels, along with a cigarette lighter engraved with the initials "L.S." He looked through the newspaper and found an article about an old woman who was killed in their neighborhood earlier that week. It hit Bill hard: Leah Schendel had been playing the nickel slots in Reno just days before the murder.

Manny's brother turned him in to the police. He wanted to get help for Manny. He thought he was doing the right thing and didn't know what else to do. He was promised counseling and support for Manny.

The trial in 1982 against Manny was a sham. His court-appointed lawyer failed to raise any coherent argument around post-traumatic stress disorder. The lawyer drank heavily, was poorly prepared for trial and gathered no background information. Years later, the lawyer pleaded no contest to charges of embezzling money from a client's trust fund and resigned from his legal practice.

Manny was found guilty by an all-white jury and was sentenced to death on May 14, 1982.



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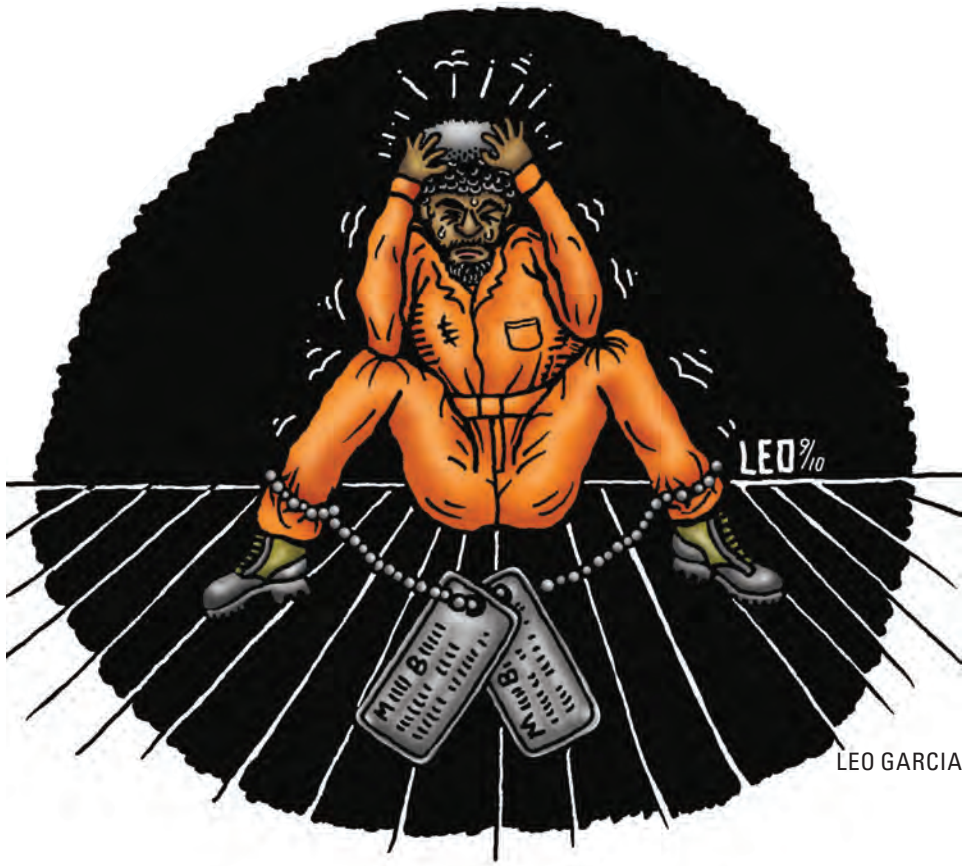
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SEMPER FI

In prison, Manny Babbitt studied Tai Chi. He became a chef and read philosophy and eastern religious books. He read and drew. He taught and counseled.

In March 1998, the Marine Corps sent two officers to pin a Purple Heart on Manny in the

warden's office at San Quentin, Calif. Manny was shackled as he stood proud and tall.

No case brought more division and heartbreak to the people of California than the case of Manny Babbitt. It arose in the heat of the law and order and victims' rights campaigns that had begun in the 1980s and spread

throughout the nation.

California's Gov. Gray Davis, himself a veteran, refused to commute the execution for Manny Babbitt, in spite of the pleas from thousands of people and the support of veterans across the country.

Marine Lance Corporal Manny Babbitt was executed one day after his 50th birthday and one minute after midnight. He was killed by lethal injection at San Quentin Prison.

He did not remember the murder of the 78-year-old grandmother he killed; instead, he continued to live in Vietnam, where even in daylight enemy soldiers were invisible behind a veil of jungle and mist. "Semper Fi" was his salutation.

Bill Babbitt watched his brother's execution, and he cried. The Marines cried. The lawyers cried. The warden cried. The guards cried. Manny saluted as well as he could; he was shackled tightly.

THE HYPOCRISY OF WAR

Manny's case remains alive because closure cannot occur through vengeance. The politicians involved in Manny's case answered the misguided needs of the victim's family, but ignored their own roles in the wars they support, in the realities facing the veterans when they return home, the very atrocities of those wars, and the crimes against humanity involved in the death penalty itself.

These politicians who have never been in

war, who have never fought in Khe Sanh, in Iraq, Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Somalia, who never dropped the nuclear bombs, smelled the burning flesh, wiped and peeled their own skin off their bones, burned and charred from napalm, how can they wholeheartedly support killing?

Diane Feinstein stated it very succinctly in the Military Honors Preservation Act, May 1998:

"A member of the United States armed forces may not enter a federal, state, or local penitentiary for the purpose of presenting a medal to a person incarcerated for committing a serious violent felony."

This bill ensures "that those who have served this nation with distinction will not see their service medals devalued by the crimes of others," said Feinstein, who supports funding wars, never having served in one.

The Schendel family stated that it was through Manny's death that they felt their family could begin to heal. As though veterans could heal by continued killing.

Manny was executed in a legalized war field. Its name is either Khe Sanh or San Quentin, death row.

Marti Hiken is the director of Progressive Avenues (progressiveavenues.org). She is the former chair of the National Lawyers Guild Military Law Task Force and the former associate director of the Institute for Public Accuracy.

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THE BALLAD OF BILLY LEE

THE UNTOLD STORY OF AN AMERICAN ‘DESAPARECIDO’ IN ARGENTINA

TEXT AND PHOTOS BY JOSEPH HUFF-HANNON

MENDOZA, Argentina—On a sun-drenched afternoon this May, Evie Lou Hunt welcomes me in to her third-floor apartment in downtown Mendoza, a city of under a million in western Argentina at the foot of the Andes. An attractive woman in her early 60s, Evie has blond hair and looks fit. After talking for hours and drinking too much coffee, we sit in the living room and listen to songs recorded by her brother Billy Lee in 1972, on a CD re-mastered from a cassette, just Billy Lee and his guitar. The opening number is a beautifully sung cover, in English, of John Lennon’s “Imagine.”

Evie shows me photos of Billy and herself standing in front of a small house with a white picket fence in Leblon, Tenn., where they were born and lived as children. In 1954, their mother, an Italian immigrant, moved them to Argentina to be closer to relatives who had settled there. Besides old family photos, spread out before us on the dining room table are a tangle of documents: newspaper clippings; pictures of Billy Lee with his band, Los Caravelles; and copies of Evie’s original habeas corpus complaint, filed a week after her brother was picked up in April 1977 in downtown Mendoza by several plain-clothed armed men and never heard from again.

“They killed all the artists, the musicians, writers. Young people, old people, everybody,” Evie Lou tells me. “We were so close, the two of us. When we came here we had to stick together. Even now I never thought of going back to the U.S., I couldn’t. I had to stay here and find out what happened to him.”

Billy Lee Hunt, a U.S. citizen, was just one of the 30,000 people kidnapped, tortured, and “disappeared” by a fascist dictatorship that seized power in the spring of 1976. When not dreaming of rock stardom, Billy studied journalism at the local university and was the head of the student union. During those years of blood and fire, this

was more than enough to be marked for death. The regime “vanished” student leaders, journalists, labor organizers, activist nuns and priest, and pretty much anyone who posed a threat to its brutal “process of national reorganization” to purge the country of leftist guerrillas and “subversion” in general (and restore power to the landed oligarchs who historically controlled much of the country’s wealth). Police or military officers often told the parents of the disappeared that their children must have run off to the mountains to join the guerrillas, or in the case of young women, that they left to work as prostitutes in Europe.

Now over 30 years later, they are being unvanished. Advances in forensic science and the tenacity of an indefatigable and organized grassroots movement for human rights and justice have been, literally and figuratively, unearthing the bones of the country’s violent past. This spring a federal judge ordered the exhumation of a mass grave in the Mendoza’s municipal cemetery, in an area where uncovered police and morgue records have shown an unusually high percentage of “John and Jane Does” buried during the early years of the dictatorship. In the first month of digging investigators from an organization called the Argentine Forensic Anthropology Team (EAAF), in collaboration with the federal government, found a shallow grave filled with up to 20 unidentified skeletons. One had its hands tied behind its back with a belt.

“We think he’s there in the cemetery somewhere, but they haven’t told me anything yet,” says Evie, who gave a blood sample in 2005 to the Anthropology Team, part of a nationwide program to create a DNA bank of family members of the disappeared in order to match DNA with found remains. “They asked me to come to the cemetery when they started digging, but I couldn’t, it was too much. It’s been 32 years, and all I really want is to give him a proper burial.”

* * *

A yellowed skeleton is laid out on a long table on the third floor of rowhouse in central Buenos Aires, above an administrative office and a call center.

“This looks like it was a young guy, maybe 18 years old,” Gabriela Ghidini tells me, a junior investigator with the EAAF. After establishing the approximate age and the sex, Ghidini measures the teenager’s height and tries to determine if he was right- or left-handed by searching for slight differences in the development of the arm and hand bones. In the torso section, Ghidini has laid out a number of red arrows on the table that point to fractures in the bone, places where bullets entered and shattered the young man’s ribs.

“These are the clearest indicators of the cause

of death, what we call peri-mortem lesions,” Ghidini tells me, taking meticulous notes in the case file attached to the young man’s remains. “Here in Argentina they mostly used bullets.”

Eventually Ghidini will choose a cut of bone or a tooth to send to a genetic laboratory a few hundred miles to the west in Cordoba. There lab technicians will grind the bone down, and attempt to extract a DNA profile to test against the national genetic database to which over 8,000 family members have donated blood samples in the last few years. This DNA bank, funded by the federal government, enabled the forensic anthropologists to identify more than 120 people and has allowed for the prosecution of hundreds of high-ranking members of the security forces since 2005, when the Argentine Supreme Court swept away a set of amnesty laws that had long protected the killers. This past May a federal judge brought new murder charges against former Argentine dictator General Jorge Rafael Videla, citing positive identifications made in the last two years by EAAF investigators from skeletons exhumed from unmarked graves in 10 cemeteries in or around Buenos Aires.

“For us it means — I can’t say happiness — but satisfaction,” Luis Fondebrider, co-founder of the EAAF, told me the day after the new charges against Videla were announced. “In our part of the world perpetrators of state terrorism often aren’t charged, or often there’s not enough information to bring them to justice. It’s one of the few times that our work helps to break through that impunity.”

Fondebrider, a harried man with wavy salt-and-pepper hair, walks me through a series of storage rooms in the second floor of the office, where hundreds of unidentified and boxed-up skeletons sit on shelves that go up to the ceiling. The boxes are numbered and labeled with



the place they were found, some labels giving more detail than others. “Bones found burnt together,” says one.

In August, the federal government gave a million-dollar grant to the Forensic Anthropology Team to continue its work, which includes attempting to analyze DNA samples from the over 700 skeletons in these rooms. Another part of the work entails identifying the genetic profiles from the latest batch of a thousand blood samples donated by family members to the national database. But while a definitive match is made in the laboratory first, it is not quite final until a parent, grandparent, sister or brother is able to see the bones with their own eyes, and know, finally, the truth.

Back upstairs I ask Gabriela Ghidini what it feels like to do this work. “In general I try not to think about the details when I’m working, but I always keep in mind why we’re doing this, to help families close a circle,” she tells me. “To do something like this, you have to do it knowing the end result.”

* * *

The former and current military men in Argentina who know where the bodies are buried have maintained an impressive pact of silence. Only a handful of whistleblowers have emerged in the last 20 years, the most famous being Adolfo Scilingo. Scilingo, a pilot, was unable to tell where the bodies were buried though — mostly because the people he helped murder were drugged and thrown, alive, into the River Plate or the sea during regular “death flights,” another macabre invention of the dictatorship. Scilingo, who confessed to participating in at least two such flights in which 30 people were “disposed of,” was convicted of crimes against humanity and torture in a Spanish courtroom in 2005. Courts in Spain, Italy, France and Germany continue to seek to extradite and try suspected Argentine war criminals for their role in the disappearance of their nation’s citizens. Despite the fact that a number of U.S. citizens, Billy Lee Hunt among them, disappeared during the bloodbath, no judicial authority in this country has taken up the case or pursued an independent investigation.



Left page, top: Billy Lee Hunt was the frontman for Los Caravelles, a rock band he founded in Argentina.

Left page, bottom: Hundreds of skeletons unearthed from mass graves, packed in boxes, remain unidentified at the forensic anthropology office in Buenos Aires.

Above: Red arrows indicate where bullets entered the young man’s torso, the likely cause of his death.

Right, top: Evie Lou Hunt, of Leblon, Tennessee, looks at old pictures of her brother in her apartment in Mendoza, Argentina.

Right, bottom: Evie Lou Hunt and her younger brother Billy Lee, as children. Billy Lee was kidnapped and disappeared by agents of the dictatorship in April 1977.





Panama Awakes

By JOSÉ ALCOFF

Antonio Smith, a 25-year-old “bananero” or banana worker, hailed from the modest Panamanian town of Changuinola, smack in an expanse of tropical flatlands bordering on Costa Rica and the Caribbean Sea. A leader in the Banana Industry Workers’ Union (Sitraibana), Smith and his fellow workers, mostly indigenous, were veterans of street actions to defend gains they had won in wages and working conditions over the years. Smith was also a member of the Cambio Democrático party and campaigned for Ricardo Martinelli in his successful bid for the presidency in 2009.

This past June 12, Martinelli’s government pushed Law 30 through the National Assembly after just four days of deliberation. Named the Chorizo Law, it mashed together parts of different bills that outlaw union shops, eliminate environmental impact surveys for industrial projects, make it more difficult to hold police accountable for abuses and killings and allow the permanent replacement of striking workers.

Observers claim Martinelli’s government is trying to undermine Panama’s labor laws to help win passage of the U.S.-Panama Free Trade Agreement, which was signed in 2007 but has been stalled in the U.S. Congress. According to a recent report by the Congressional Research Service, “Panama’s relatively high labor costs (for the hemisphere) and inflexible labor laws can be a frustration if not an impediment to U.S. foreign direct investment.”

The Chorizo Law’s impact was immediately felt in Changuinola, home to the Bocas Fruit Company, a subsidiary of the notoriously anti-labor Chiquita Brands. Bocas announced days after the passage of Law 30 that it would no longer collect union dues from workers on its huge banana plantations, violating its contract with Sitraibana. All 4,200 bananeros at Bocas, including Antonio Smith, launched a 48-hour strike on July 2.

With the support of the Labor Ministry,

Bocas declared the strike illegal and docked the workers’ pay, including two weeks of back pay. This only inflamed the protest in Changuinola as banana workers extended their strike, joined by 3,000 more bananeros affiliated with a cooperative; students walked out of local public schools; and trees were felled across streets to hinder riot police being flown in. Demonstrations grew further as members of two indigenous communities, the Ngäbe and Naso, streamed into the town to protest evictions by Martinelli’s administration, which wants to build hydroelectric dams on their lands.

On July 8, bananeros marched on a local highway. National police arrived in armor, on foot and in a helicopter and began shooting teargas and buckshot into the crowd. Dozens fell. Antonio Smith took his last breath. Another bananero, Virigilio Castillo, was shot, handcuffed, beaten and executed by police, according to a report by Human Rights Everywhere. The government admitted two bananeros were shot to death, and human rights investigators said three young children and an elderly protester died of asphyxiation from tear gas. Hundreds were wounded, including 47 people who lost one or both eyes.

ARRESTED MOVEMENT

In the ensuing days, mass protests shut down towns in Bocas, and the national police arrested 300 union leaders and activists from around the country; some were snatched while meeting to plan a response to the killings. Militants from unions and the left burned down a local bank, blockaded more streets and took captive three police who were released within days.

Martinelli cancelled plans to fly to the World Cup in South Africa, and his government announced on July 11 that provisions in Law 30 relating to labor, the environment and police would be suspended for 90 days while it convened a “national dialogue.”

Not one to back down, Martinelli told the media the same day, “We will not allow the banana industry in Changuinola to disap-

pear, thanks to union leaders ... who have no idea of what democracy is in a country and who want to end the rule of law.” Panama’s two main labor federations held a successful nationwide general strike on July 13, and battle lines were drawn.

“This is war. Anything can happen now,” says Cesar Santos, an activist based in Chiriqui, just south of Bocas del Toro province, where Changuinola is located.

MARTINELLI COMES TO TOWN

A white, ultra-conservative grocery chain magnate, Martinelli seemed an unlikely candidate to capture the presidency in a historically rebellious country of 3.3 million people, nearly 90 percent of whom are of African, indigenous or Asian descent. Martinelli campaigned in favor of a flat tax and neoliberal policies opposed by most Panamanians. He was nicknamed Loco because of his hot temper and a rumored bipolar disorder. His supporters adopted it as a badge of honor with shirts and bumper stickers declaring “Los Locos Somos Más” (The lunatics are more).

Martinelli found an opening in the perennial issues of crime and corruption and by opposing legislation by his predecessor, President Martin Torrijos, to militarize security forces and increase surveillance.

While the Panamanian left is active, it has no electoral organ. All the major parties are on the right. Relative to these, Torrijos’ party, the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), is on the left. The party of the former military regime, the PRD pushed through the free-trade agreement, favored privatization, kept a tempered foreign policy and was socially moderate. But it began to re-militarize the national police and coast guard in a country whose constitution, imposed by the United States after it invaded in 1989, forbids a military. Toward the end of its administration, the PRD alienated some supporters by killing three members of Suntracs, the Marxist construction union.

Like all Panamanian politicians, Martinelli’s campaign against corruption meant

A SEA OF RED FLAGS: Construction workers march against the Chorizo Law. PHOTO: ERIC JACKSON

cracking down on past corruption so his cronies could have a freer hand to skim the treasury. Low voter turnout and an alliance with personality-based far-right parties secured his election victory.

And the man who owns a stable of racehorses was off, bickering with Venezuela, sending Cuban doctors who provide free medical care packing and supporting the coup d’état in Honduras. Martinelli has also come under fire for trying to appoint partisans to the Supreme Court and reneging on promises to demilitarize the police and because many political appointments and handpicked candidates have been mired in corruption scandals.

Many Panamanians were especially upset when, in a meeting with Obama last year, Martinelli opened four naval bases to the Pentagon. U.S. forces first landed in Panama in 1846 and were only forced out in 2000 after decades of struggle.

THE CHORIZO LAW

Lenin Montilla, a law student in the capital of Panama City, says chorizo “may be needed for a lot of recipes, but you never really want to know what went into it.” That’s how the opposition characterizes two new laws passed in June by the National Assembly after being ground and molded together by Martinelli. Few legislators bothered to read them, and the government tried to bury the official publication in an obscure document.

Law 30 begins with reforms of the civil aviation industry and segues to measures such as:

- Ending environmental impact studies on projects that are in the “social interest,” whether public or private, such as highways, hydroelectric dams, and strip mines.
- Banning mandatory dues for workers in union shops, which makes union-busting much easier by allowing employers to pressure workers individually to drop out of the union.
- Allowing employers to fire striking workers and permanently hire scabs. Employers and scabs are then granted police protection during strikes.
- Criminalizing street blockades, which are a daily occurrence in Panama.
- Protecting police from prosecution or pre-trial incarceration for murder and other charges.

Law 14 was next, offering concessions for mining companies and requiring nonprofits to conduct monthly audits online, which could force many small NGOs that lack internet access to shutter.

The laws have led Panama’s leftist social movements to overcome some of their differences. Thousands of environmentalists hit the streets in their biggest protest ever, accompanied by union workers, students and indigenous activists. Radical unions of the CONUSI labor federation and the rank and file within the moderate CONATO federation organized further protests, accompanied by environmental and feminist groups.

On June 28, a general strike and large marches were held with different unions organizing their own actions. Suntracs workers constructing new locks in the Canal

TIMELINE

JULY 1, 2009
Grocery-store magnate Ricardo Martinelli assumes the presidency.

JUNE 12, 2010
Law 30 passed.

JUNE 28
First general strike shuts down most of Panama City as well as many industries, businesses and schools around the country.

JULY 2
Banana workers go on strike.

JULY 8
Police fire on strikers in Changuinola, killing seven and wounding 439; workers take three police hostage.

JULY 10
Attempting to prevent a response to the killings, national police preemptively arrest 300 labor leaders, journalists and activists.

JULY 11
The three police are released, as are most of the unionists. The remaining arrestees are released by July 15.

JULY 13
Second general strike draws wide support after killing of banana workers.

AUG. 8
Government holds negotiations on the “Chorizo Law,” but excludes all the radical left social sectors. It agrees to delay implementation for three months.

AUG. 23
Third general strike launched by the radical unions in CONUSI.



PANAMA NO SE VENDE: Students in Panama City wear pig masks at a rally against the Martinelli government and the police murders. 'Panama is not for sale' is written on the shoulder of the student to the right. PHOTO: CLAUDIA FIGUEROA

Zone went on strike, and the government pressured the Spanish-led consortium of corporations there to fire 48 strikers. The multinational worked out a settlement and rehired all the workers, but Martinelli's government has since announced a deal with the Honduran government to import 5,000 construction workers, who may be used to replace the militant Suntracs workers.

Two days after the massacre in Changuinola, 300 movement leaders across the country were arrested, from radicals like the leader of Suntracs to moderates in the social security union. Many were arrested in hospitals after being wounded in protests. Most were released within hours, but some were held for a week. Suntracs Secretary General Saúl Méndez was among 18 unionists served with warrants for incitement.

"Martinelli has alternated between carrots and sticks since the massacre," says Federico Escartín, one of those arrested during the round-ups. The government began distributing toys and food to indigenous communities around Changuinola after the killings, but at the gravesides of Antonio Smith and Virgilio Castillo thousands gathered chanting, "We don't want bikes or sacks of rice, we want justice!"

After the banana workers ended their strike on July 11, CONUSI and CONATO organized a general strike on July 23 that shut down the education and construction sectors completely, and idled most other industries except manufacturing. The two federations have organized a boycott of Martinelli's Super99 grocery chain and the Valera liquor brands owned by his chief legislative ally.

While Martinelli's administration called for a national dialogue, it all but uninvited CONUSI. The National Front for the Defense of Economic and Social Rights, an umbrella group that includes CONUSI, also stayed away, pointing to the government-picked moderates and businessmen who dominated the meeting. Unity of the Integral People's Struggle, a moderate coalition present at the talks, stated that Martinelli's negotiators offered no concessions to unions and environmentalists.

In addition, the government is supporting the Chiquita Brands subsidiary in denying pay for striking bananeros. It is also trying to push through a bill that would give Martinelli the power to appoint the leaders of the Ngäbe indigenous autonomous zone, where most banana workers are from.

Opposition to Martinelli and other tycoons is pouring out, with even some business owners opposed to the anti-labor and anti-environmental laws. The resistance to Martinelli, who is eyeing changing the constitution to give himself a second term, is uniting often disparate elements. With the government relying on an iron fist, a growing movement says it will not back down.

GLOSSARY

DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTIONARY PARTY (PRD): Political party founded by the Gen. Omar Torrijos dictatorship in the 1970s. The PRD favors the re-militarization of Panama and last controlled the presidency from 2004 to 2009.

THE NATIONAL FRONT FOR THE DEFENSE OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RIGHTS (FRENADESO): Founded in 2003 during the successful struggle against the privatization of social security. A Marxist-based umbrella group that focuses on street actions over electoral politics, it includes radical student groups, the banana workers union, construction workers union and CONUSI, the radical labor federation.

UNITY OF THE INTEGRAL PEOPLE'S STRUGGLE (ULIP): Founded in 2004 by CONATO, a moderate coalition, ULIP is connected to the left wing of the PRD.

THE NATIONAL UNION UNITY COUNCIL (CONUSI): The radical wing of the labor federation. Some 80,000 strong, it includes banana, construction and manufacturing workers and the main teachers union.

THE NATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF ORGANIZED WORKERS (CONATO): Moderate labor federation of 150,000 mainly drawn from the health-care, manufacturing and government sectors.

LAW 30: Also known as the Chorizo Law, this hodgepodge of various bills would weaken unions and environmental laws while banning street blockades and making it difficult to prosecute police officers for various offenses, including murder.

LAW 14: Passed immediately after the Chorizo Law, it imposed multiyear prison sentences for street blockades, a daily occurrence in the country, and stringent audit requirements on nonprofits.

SUNTRACS: A Marxist union of 40,000 construction workers, it is the largest union in CONUSI and a leading force in Frenadeso.

SITRAIBANA: Approximately 4,000 banana workers, predominately indigenous, who live and work in Western Panama.

DEMOCRATIC CHANGE (CD): Socially conservative, this party represents the wealthier and whiter sectors of Panama and it leads a coalition of right-wing parties.

José Alcott is a Panamanian-American freelance reporter. He can be contacted at jose.alcott@gmail.com

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Austerity

Continued from page 5

suffer decreased government spending? Millions of workers in Greece, France and elsewhere in Europe have organized general strikes under the slogan, “We have paid for their profits; we will not pay for their crisis.” Millions more mobilized by trade unions and their political allies participated in a Europe-wide day of protest on Sept. 29.

They are challenging the efforts by Europe’s capitalists and politicians to pass austerity programs cutting public payrolls and services. In the United States, the continuing crisis and state and local austerity embitter millions who have yet to replicate Europe’s mass mobilizations. Many Americans blame Obama and the government, seek scapegoats such as immigrants, and threaten to vote for Republicans, who favor austerity even more than Democrats.

It is not uncommon to read or hear comments such as the following: An Athens trucker says, “Public employees here don’t work hard enough, so it is reasonable to cut their pay.” A Parisian clerk thinks it “reasonable to postpone the official retirement age a few years; we all live longer now.” A Minneapolis secretary agrees that it is “reasonable, in crisis times, to get by with fewer public services.” A New York lab technician supports a new tax on cellphones as “probably reasonable; after all, people overuse them.”

Yet, if austerity is to be imposed, there are other, far more “reasonable” options to consider.

A different kind of austerity — collecting income taxes from U.S.-based multinational corporations and wealthy individuals — could generate vast revenues. For example, the United States currently levies no property tax on the trillions of dollars of intangible property such as stocks and bonds. If Washington levied a small tax on anyone’s intangible property over, say, \$1,000,000, it would raise huge new revenues, reduce deficits and weaken the rationale for austerity; so would ending tax exemptions for multi-billion-dollar private universities such as Harvard, Yale and Stanford. Exiting the Iraq and Afghanistan disasters could divert money to overcome crisis without mass austerity. Such alternatives are being struggled over in other countries.

Capitalism first generated this global crisis and now proposes mass austerity to “overcome” it. We should learn from capitalism’s repeated failures and be publicly debating whether America and the world might be better served by transitioning to a new, non-capitalist system. Having learned hard lessons from the first socialist attempts during the last century in Russia, China and beyond, we need to rise to the challenge to make a new attempt that avoids their failures and builds on their strengths. When better than now?

Rick Wolff teaches in the graduate program in International Affairs of The New School in New York. His work is available at rdwolff.com.

Argentina

Continued from page 9

released by the National Security Archive, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit investigative journalism institute. “We won’t cause you unnecessary difficulties.”

“The vision we have from the South is of the U.S. as custodians of a horrific order,” Ramón Abalo, a retired journalist, tells me in his office in downtown Mendoza. I ask Ramón why it’s important to look at the past, when present-day Argentina has plenty of other daunting problems — unemployment, poverty, capital flight and brain drain.

“When we talk about 30,000 people, we’re not talking about an imaginary number. We’re talking about how they got rid of a whole class of people who thought a certain way. All of this happened to install a socio-economic plan.” Ramon says he usually doesn’t smoke, but he lights a cigarette as he talks, saying he has to when he discusses those times.

“Look at the Pope [John Paul II]. Somebody shot him, and he pardoned the guy, but a judge still tried him. The constant fight of the human rights movements here has led to an understanding among a large majority of Argentines that here a genocide happened. There’s a consensus. But here nobody has ever asked for forgiveness. Let’s look forward, too, but when you have an open wound, it doesn’t close by itself.”

Besides justice, truth is the other salve that the human rights movement in Argentina has been demanding for decades now, and among the myriad unsolved crimes, one

thing those declassified intelligence documents might be able to clear up is what happened to a young U.S. citizen named Billy Lee Hunt, whose bones may or may not be buried in a cemetery in Mendoza. After her brother’s disappearance Evie Lou visited the U.S. Embassy in Buenos Aires a number of times and was told each time that they had no knowledge of his whereabouts. Her U.S. passport, and that of her brother, offered little protection at the time. The American intelligence apparatus, which had close ties with the junta, and the embassies, run by the State Department, operate on notoriously different tracks.

These distinctions don’t matter much to Evie, who spends the last Thursday of every month at a vigil with other human rights activists and families of the disappeared in front of the federal courthouse in Mendoza.

“I want to know what happened. I want to know who took him. I want to know who buried him.”

One afternoon Evie shows me the plaque with hundreds of names on it, mounted on a monument to the disappeared across from the courthouse. She rubs the dust from her brother’s name. “You poor thing,” she says. “He was such a happy guy, always telling jokes. That’s why nobody could believe it when they took him.”

After a walk around a downtown park, we eat a late lunch at Evie’s house, vegetarian lasagna with a glass of red wine. Evie proposes a toast: “Here’s to seeing those military bastards finally facing justice.”



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MOM, APPLE PIE AND ISLAMOPHOBIA



FRANK REYNOLDS

BY ARUN GUPTA

The current nativist impulse is not new. The right's anti-Muslim campaign is eerily similar to 19th-century anti-Catholic bigotry in America. Catholics here were subject to discrimination and violence because many didn't speak English; religious practices such as confession, veneration of saints and transubstantiation seemed alien; many of their women (nuns) donned strange garb; and they were characterized as a fifth column loyal to a sinister foreign power, the Pope.

Likewise, Islamophobia goes back two centuries to Orientalism, which portrayed much of the world, particularly Arab and Islam, as barbaric and irrational in contrast to an enlightened West. More recently, American popular culture reacted to the Arab oil boycott in 1973 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979 with the image of the despotic sheikh and fanatical mullah who prey upon a West enfeebled by secularism and liberal-

ism. From there followed the "Worse Than Hitler" parade: Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, Yasser Arafat, Muammar Qaddafi, Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden and Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

The Islamophobia that sprouted after the Sept. 11 attacks was planted in this noxious soil. Curiously, it has taken nine years for Islamophobia to reach a fever pitch, at least in America (Europe was quicker to the game).

So why now?

One explanation is Bush, who, after 9/11, described Islam as "a faith based upon peace and love and compassion." Bush had to deny the role of religion in the "war on terror" to ensure broad international support for new wars. Later, however, Bush claimed "Islamofascism" was an "ideology that is real and profound." So while Bush the Republican was willing to throw red meat to the bigots, Bush the president was compelled to tone down the bigotry in the interest of statecraft.

Now, freed from the burdens of power, the Republicans can reap the benefits of Islamo-

phobia by stoking the base passions of the right, while not having to pay the price for any international repercussion. What makes the bigotry so powerful at this point is Obama.

Going back to the 2008 election, the right has successfully painted Obama as the Other. Since Obama took office, the percentage of Americans who say Obama is Muslim has increased sharply. In August, during the run-up to the anti-Muslim rallies on Sept. 11, one poll found that 31 percent of Republicans thinks Obama is a Muslim, nearly double the percentage who said so in March 2009.

Believing Obama is a Muslim or foreign born or motivated by "Kenyan anticolonial behavior" is indicative of the conspiratorial mindset that the right cultivates. In *Mobilizing Resentment*, Jean Hardisty writes that the "right uses three specific forms of intolerance — stereotyping, scapegoating and demonizing — to mobilize and organize recruits." These techniques "reinforce an us-them dichotomy" and "help a protest movement fix blame for social ills on easily understood targets." Hardisty explains that demonizing the hated group "draws anger away from real sources of social ills." This "allows for greater dominance by elites, while creating the impression of increased empowerment for those expressing their intolerance."

Stoked to a white-hot fury by the right, many Americans castigate Obama and his policies. But this opposition is both remote and abstract; venting rage on mosques and Muslims offers a concrete outlet.

The hatred (the appropriate term) goes far beyond opposing the Cordoba House in Manhattan. A Gallup poll from 2006 found that 39 percent of Americans think Muslims should carry a special identification. Today, a *Time* magazine poll found that a majority of Americans have an unfavorable view of Muslims and nearly one-third think Muslims should be barred from running for president or sitting on the Supreme Court.

These sentiments get acted on with public hate-spewing and attacks against mosques, a rise in hate crimes against Muslims over

the last decade and a huge surge in employment discrimination.

By targeting the Other, the right also defines "real" Americans. Nearly 50 years ago, historian Richard Hofstadter argued that the "modern right wing ... feels dispossessed." They feel "America has largely been taken away from them and their kind." Anti-Muslim protests are both an attempt to deny the public display of the other's symbols and a way to stoke resentment that the government is devaluing the true majority's values and beliefs.

While the racism is real, it is given coherence by right-wing fanatics like David Horowitz, Frank Gaffney, William Kristol, Michelle Malkin, Gary Bauer, Newt Gingrich and Sarah Palin, who support and in some cases organize and fund the anti-Muslim campaign.

Since last year, the right has been hysterically claiming that Sharia, or Islamic law, is being imposed in the United States with the backing of the Obama administration. Frank Gaffney's Center for Security Policy has been leading the charge, having just published a 177-page report entitled "Sharia: The Threat to America."

Linking Obama to Islam is a way to turn tactical opposition in the upcoming midterm elections into a holy war in which no compromise is possible. Hofstadter described it as a paranoid mindset that believes "the enemy is totally evil and totally unappeasable [so] he must be totally eliminated."

In a recent *Newsweek* poll, a staggering 52 percent of Republicans said they think it is definitely or probably true that Obama "sympathizes with the goals of Islamic fundamentalists who want to impose Islamic law around the world."

These wild beliefs reveal how much of the population is mentally unhinged. Though if the Obama White House had shown as much concern for the average worker as it did for investment bankers, there would be far less economic and social anxiety for the right wing to exploit. But that's now history.

¡Viva Machete!

Machete

DIRECTED BY ETHAN MANIQUIS AND ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

20TH CENTURY FOX, 2010

Speeding on a dusty road to arrest a drug lord, the Mexican Federales named Machete is told to turn around. Instead he rams his car into a drug den. Guards open fire, machine guns jumping in their arms like jackhammers, but our man is twirling his scythe-like machete. Heads roll on the floor as necks spurt fountains of cherry-red blood.

Welcome to the first five minutes of director Robert Rodriguez's new movie *Machete*. Dirty, violent, it's a tongue-in-cheek movie that spits broken teeth at the audience and smiles.

An outrageous revenge fantasy, *Machete* is a political catharsis for audiences frustrated by the rising racism — from the slashing of a Muslim taxi driver to Arizona's season of hate. Muslims and Mexicans have become the new scapegoats for conservatives who channel white anxiety into Islamophobia and racism for political gain.

Racism is terrifying but here is a movie that purges terror into over-the-top revenge. Machete, played with lumbering grace by Danny Trejo, is offered \$150,000 to kill an immi-



grant-bashing Texas state senator played by Robert De Niro. Our hero is double-crossed, and one of the wildest fight scenes in recent cinema begins. From a disemboweled man whose ropery intestines Machete uses to dive out a window to a crisp-fried corpse with a Thanksgiving turkey timer stuck in it, the movie's violence is cartoonish. It gives the audience the pleasure of revenge without the consequence of guilt or fear of stigma.

The first act of a narrative is to create

identification with the protagonist. We identify with Machete because of his decency. His family was killed by the drug lord because he refused a bribe. He gave his pay for the hit to a taco truck driver named Luz, played by Michelle Rodriguez, who is also She (à la Che), the head of the Network, an underground movement of workers. He even asks his priest played by Cheech Marin for permission to kill his enemies.

Machete's simple moral code demands

violence to discipline a corrupt world. He is a symbol for the repressed rage of terrified immigrants. And it's no wonder as bad guys close in on Machete that the working-class immigrants rally around him.

What follows is a lesson on the difference between reactionary and revolutionary violence. As philosopher Slavoj Žižek wrote in *The Ticklish Subject*, "The Right legitimizes its suspension of the Ethical ... by a reference to its particular (religious, patriotic) identity which overrules any universal moral standards. The Left legitimizes its suspension of the Ethical precisely by means of a reference to the true Universality to come."

In the climactic battle we can see the difference as the Network has Mexicans, whites, blacks, women and men fighting together in Žižek's "true Universality" against the cowboy white men with guns protecting their "particular identity."

So when conspiracy-addled radio host Alex Jones says the movie could spark a race war he misses the point. We are not in a race war but in a racist war because the systemic violence is one way, targeting Mexicans (and Muslims).

Machete's violence is comical, even gross, but moral because it destroys a system that has destroyed generations of people. It's why audiences howled with laughter in May when the trailer came out and mountain-like Machete, belt full of knives, stared at the audience and said, "This is Machete with a special Cinco de Mayo message ... to Arizona!"

—NICHOLAS POWERS

Caught Between a Wall and a Shipwreck

Midnight on the Mavi Marmara: The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and How It Changed the Course of the Israel/Palestine Conflict

EDITED BY MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI
OR BOOKS, 2010

A Wall in Palestine

RENÉ BACKMANN, TRANSLATED BY A. KAISER
PICADOR, 2010

BY ALEX KANE

The Israel/Palestine conflict has become so all-consuming that even objects are central to the struggle.

Two recent books illustrate this fact. René Backmann's *A Wall in Palestine* looks at the planned 490-mile-long, 25-foot-high wall, complete with fencing, trenches, thermal imaging and sniper towers, that Israel is building in parts of the West Bank. The second work, *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara*, is a collection of essays examining the deadly Israeli attack on an international seaborne convoy. The "Freedom Flotilla" was attempting to break the crippling blockade of Gaza, which began in 2007 when Hamas took power after winning democratic elections and defeating a U.S.-backed effort to install Fatah, the party that lost the elections, into power.

Both works reveal how inanimate objects — the wall and the flotilla of six ships — have become so imbued with conflicting meanings and ideas that they can be seen as actors that create new actions in their wake, such as the plans by international activists to launch new ships to Gaza or the growing boycott, divestment and sanctions movement that takes aim at Israeli colonization, particularly what many have labeled the "apartheid wall."

While French journalist Backmann's work is a useful contribution to understanding the separation barrier, the author all too easily adopts the language of the Israeli occupation and spends little time on crucial context and history relating to the Israel/Palestine conflict. *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara*, on the other hand, gives readers a much more comprehensive look into the current situation as well as vital history and context, like explaining why the ongoing "peace process" is bankrupt.

The International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion, ruled the separation barrier to be illegal under international law in 2004. The vast majority of it snakes through occupied Palestinian territory, slicing up Palestinian villages and cutting off access to urban areas.

The idea of separating the Palestinian population from the Israeli population has deep roots within Zionist ideology and has been proposed by Israeli officials for decades.

But it wasn't until the aftermath of the second Palestinian Intifada that began in 2000, and Ariel Sharon's rise to power, that the idea of constructing a physical barrier was seriously considered. Ironically, the right-wing Likud Party, of which Sharon was a long-time member, was originally wary of the concept. The idea of a barrier built on Israel's borders as established in the aftermath of the 1947-49 war — as some Israeli politicians on the left suggested — might create the boundaries for a future Palestinian state and leave Israel's colonization project of the West Bank in jeopardy, something that right-wing Zionists had no interest in.



The *Mavi Marmara*. PHOTO: FREEGAZA.ORG

In 2002, after a wave of Palestinian suicide bombings inside Israel, the Israeli government under Sharon decided to begin building the barrier.

Although security for Israeli civilians was the stated justification for the wall, its route made clear that it was primarily an annexation project. As the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem explains, "a major aim in setting the route was de facto annexation of land: when the Barrier is completed, some nine percent of the West Bank, containing 60 settlements, will be situated on the western — the 'Israeli' — side." Other benefits of the route of the barrier from the Israeli perspective include, as Backmann notes, the taking of fertile land and precluding the possibility of a Palestinian state.

When describing the Sharon government's siege of the Occupied Territories in 2001, Backmann refers to civilian casualties as "collateral damage." On a number of occasions, he refers to the West Bank uncritically and without quotes as Judea-Samaria, which is the biblical term used by Israeli settlers.

Backmann fails to discuss the events of 1947-49 that led to the creation of Israel, including the ethnic cleansing of 750,000 Palestinians by 1949. An exploration of the colonial nature of Zionism would help explain why Israel sees no problem with building a separation barrier that tramples on the human rights of Palestinians.

Also missing is an in-depth discussion of the rise of popular resistance movements across the West Bank, which developed in response to the building of the barrier.

Resistance to the Israeli occupation isn't just confined to Palestinian villages, though, as the events of the May 31 Freedom Flotilla, explored magnificently in *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara*, show. The flotilla was an international effort that included 600 passengers from a multitude of nations, and attempted to break the blockade of the Gaza Strip by sea.

The book is a comprehensive antidote to Israel's attempt to spin the events as a group of savage Islamist terrorists "lynching" defenseless Israeli soldiers. The reports from eyewitnesses who were aboard the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara* are clear: As the flotilla was in international waters, Israeli

commandos rappelled onto the *Marmara*, opened fire and killed nine people. A recently released U.N. report authored by three human rights experts found the Israeli raid to be illegal, "disproportionate" and brutal.

Beyond the lucid eyewitness accounts, the book includes exceptional analyses of what the attack means and where the international solidarity movement goes from here. Philip Weiss and Adam Horowitz, editors of the blog Mondoweiss (for which I am a contributor), aptly call the attack on the flotilla a moment that has caused "many to consider what Zionism has built in the Middle East."

Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the Washington, D.C.-based Palestine Center, reminds readers that Israel massacring civilians is not a new phenomenon, nor is the world's apparent unwillingness to hold Israel accountable for war crimes.

While it is a one-stop shop for all things "Freedom Flotilla," *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara* has a dearth of original content, with most contributions being reprints. It's an understandable shortcoming given the lightning-quick turnaround. But it reads more as an immediate reaction to the flotilla killings than a reflection on how and why the flotilla marks a "turning point" in the Israel/Palestine conflict. There are a couple of duds as well. For instance, Stephen Walt, the co-author of *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, writes an uncharacteristically boring "how-to" guide on "defend[ing] the indefensible."

By and large, though, if one wants to understand the attack on the flotilla and the utter necessity of building an international solidarity movement that will finally bring Israeli apartheid down, this is the book to read. It couldn't have come out at a better time; while the world's media incessantly focus on recently re-launched "peace talks," the real work of bringing about liberation for the Palestinian people can be found in efforts like the Freedom Flotilla.

Adam Shapiro, a co-founder of the International Solidarity Movement, succinctly closes out the book with his piece on the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement and the effort to break the blockade of Gaza through ever-escalating direct action: "The days of the oppression of Palestinians — whether in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, in refugee camps, or in the diaspora — are numbered. It is now in all our power to expedite that day of liberation."

Activists are organizing to send a U.S. boat with the next flotilla to help break the siege of Gaza. To get involved, visit ustogaza.org.

Feminism, Paint and Matzo Meal

Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism

SEPT. 12, 2010–JAN. 30, 2011

THE JEWISH MUSEUM

1109 FIFTH AVE.

BY MIKE NEWTON

Do you know Phyllis Schlafly? An outspoken activist and accomplished attorney, a die-hard conservative and lifelong right-wing pundit, a staunch advocate for traditional domesticity, she'd never let herself be mistaken for a feminist. But oh, how the ground shifts: among others on the right, Sarah Palin now trumpets herself as a proud feminist — a free-market, anti-abortion, “family values” feminist. The question becomes one of essences, foundations: surely not all powerful women are feminists, but what are feminists, then? In the '60s and '70s, many second-wave feminist writers linked feminism with socialism and with then-burgeoning social justice movements. Is there feminism without radicalism?

ries, was considered the exclusive province of men, the chance to sit down at your desk, think about it for a little while, and then become a god. (Compare them with the chilly sarcasm of Deborah Kass' “Double Red Yentl, Split,” a post-Warhol pop-portrait of Barbra Streisand; a very different sort of creation.)

Feminism has always been linked with other struggles, and many of the artists in this show have taken part in progressive activist movements, even if polemics never crept into their artwork. On the more abjectly political side, we have Nancy Spero and Leon Golub, the venerable husband-and-wife dyad who, for better or worse, did not shy away from blunt representations of violence and strife (relating to Vietnam and the Holocaust, in this case). For the most part, though, the show is a bit quieter than all that. Audrey Flack's early-1960s still life “Matzo Meal” (in the key of Manischewitz) gently reflects on Jewish domesticity in the consumer era; Judy Chicago's gridded abstraction “Sky Flesh” meditates on power and ritual via the sweetened hues of an afternoon sky. Younger sensibilities can be found in prankish, fun-



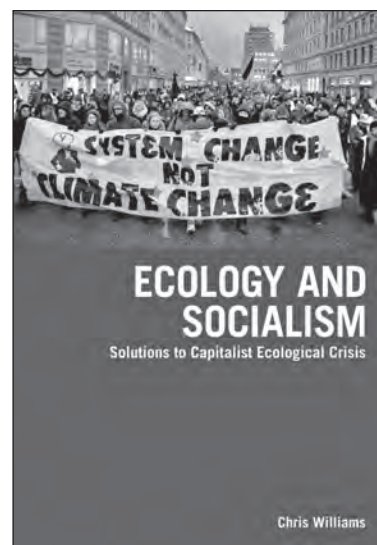
“Matzo Meal” by Audrey Flack.

It's a good question to consider while viewing *Shifting the Gaze: Painting and Feminism*, a small but potent exhibit at The Jewish Museum. The show is heavy on abstract painting, heavy on work from the '60s and '70s — times when “feminism” was more starkly realized. Or was it? Artists like Melissa Meyer and Joan Snyder give us bright, action-packed work in the famously masculine Abstract Expressionist idiom; like the proverbial female disciplinarian, or the woman who climbs the ranks in some brutal corporation, this work raises questions of what it means for women to triumph in male-dominated fields. Meanwhile, two pieces by Miriam Schapiro present an intriguing counterpoint. The first piece, “Fanfare,” is a charming, sensuous painting in the AbEx mode; the second, “Blue Burst Fan,” is a sort of decorative fabric work. Somewhere along the line, Schapiro's project shifted from the more established model of abstract painting toward that of imbuing traditionally “feminine” crafts with a messy emotionality.

Concerns of women and creation are, perhaps, best looked for here in Louise Fishman's small-scale works: paintings that reimagine Jewish ritual and myth from a personal, female perspective. These paintings access the sort of creative power which, for so many centu-

ny scenes from Nicole Eisenman and Dana Schutz. Amy Sillman gives us both a sophisticated, somatic abstraction from 2010 and some great comic strips (from *Heresies* magazine), drawn in the thick of the '70s art world.

Maybe I just have some impulse toward the literal, or textual, but the two artworks that I found the most effective here, the most haunting, both involve Stars of David. In Dana Frankfort's “Star of David (orange),” we see an artist playing with language and culture, pushing and pulling one of the most loaded icons you could ever find; or, she's just painting some messy orange triangles onto a canvas. The work questions the power and cultural heft of simple symbols. Then there's a little untitled painting of a woman's truncated, naked torso with the breasts turned into Stars of David, and around her neck a pendant of a woman's breast. This work wields a perverse power, like a political cartoon from some foreign newspaper. It's a chance to reflect on issues of gender, ritual, institutions—issues that have been so adroitly explored by decades of feminist scholarship. The artist, Lee Lozano, ended up eschewing feminism: She felt that as an ideology, it was too limited and constricting. Go figure.



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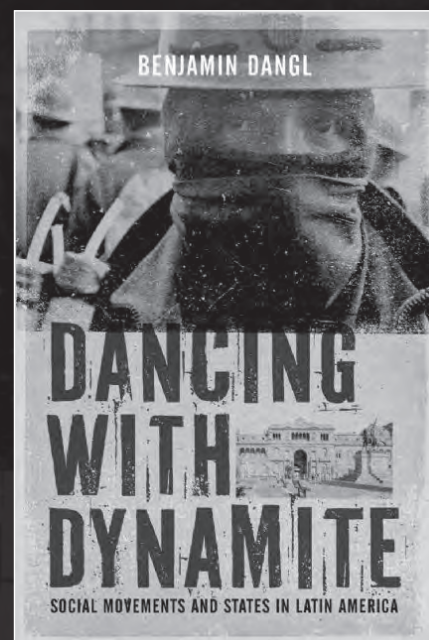
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